

Dorcas *Syria*

Improving health and
developing resilience



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We are Dorcas

Dorcas is a faith-based organisation that provides humanitarian assistance and facilitates development cooperation. We invest in sustainable change in the lives of people who are marginalised. In the event of poverty, exclusion or a crisis, we create opportunities for them to flourish.

What we believe

We believe in the value and God-given potential of every single person. We are called to demonstrate God’s love for those in need.

What we see

We see a world where poverty, exclusion and crisis marginalise people. We also see the potential of these people and their communities to flourish despite their difficult circumstances.

How we work

Accountable: We do what we say, work transparently and use resources wisely.

Compassionate: We see those in need and stand next to them.

Determined: We have an entrepreneurial spirit and do not give up.

Locally led: We work through local leadership, staff and partners.

What we do

We empower people who are marginalised to develop their talents. And we enable disadvantaged communities to flourish. We equip individuals and communities to promote and ensure participation of all.

We create hope and long-term perspectives in volatile and complex situations. We meet people’s basic needs in times of crisis and increase their ability to

overcome poverty and exclusion. We persist despite frequent setbacks and invest in durable relationships to realise sustainable change.

We are part of a global movement of individuals and organisations working for a just and fair world. We recognise and appreciate everybody who supports our work. And we actively partner with others to create synergy and amplify our impact.

Theory of Change

Dorcas views poverty as a condition in which people cannot realise their intellectual, material, physical, social and spiritual needs and capacities. This kind of poverty is often related to exclusion mechanisms and barriers within society. We want to contribute to the protection, inclusion and resilience of people living in poverty, experiencing exclusion or caught in a crisis. Our Theory of Change recognises that transformation is needed at the individual, community and societal levels. We seek to realise a six-fold impact that results in flourishing people and communities.

Dorcas works towards change on three levels:

1. Individual

We create opportunities for people and, if necessary, we also provide for their basic needs.

2. Community

We invest in resilient, self-organising communities; we strengthen the position of certain groups, such as older people, people with disabilities and minority groups, and we encourage community members to support each other and stand up for themselves.

3. Society

We cooperate with local authorities and partners and motivate them to take their responsibilities. We tackle taboos by ensuring that everyone has a voice and that everyone is included.

The Dorcas Theory of Change is translated into programme concepts that create impact,

demonstrate our added value and inform the programmatic priorities set by each Country Office.

The three programme concepts are:

Humanitarian Assistance and Recovery

Humanitarian Assistance and Recovery focuses on saving people’s lives and preserving their dignity during disasters or crises. People’s immediate needs are met, communities are enabled to become resilient to shocks and governments are actively involved in contributing to safer and more peaceful communities.

Social Empowerment and Protection

Social Empowerment and Protection seeks to ensure that the poorest and most marginalised have access to basic services, like health and education, and are empowered in their social development. This is realised by organising and mobilising communities to solve their own problems and work on opportunities through asset-based community development processes.

Inclusive Entrepreneurship

Inclusive Entrepreneurship enables disadvantaged people and groups to acquire the attitudes, competences and skills they need to earn an income and build their dreams. This is realised by creating social and economic value through entrepreneurial livelihoods and applying it to self-employment, small businesses, member-based entities or social enterprises.



Dorcas in Syria



Dorcas began its operations in Syria in 2013 and was registered there as an INGO in 2016. Our main country office is situated in Damascus and a regional office operates in Aleppo. Through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Health, Dorcas can deliver services across different regions of Syria. We effectively reach and assist communities in need by implementing an integrated approach that combines health, community-based protection and food security and livelihoods. We realise that by using approaches within the programme concept Humanitarian Assistance and Recovery (our key focus) and through life skills and vocational training. Protection is an integral aspect of all our approaches.

Dorcas Syria aims to alleviate poverty, promote social justice, and empower individuals and communities to build a sustainable future. Our comprehensive and integrated approach to achieve this contains several key elements.

We realise sustainable development by focusing on long-term projects that address the root causes of poverty and vulnerability while working closely with local communities to identify their needs and collaborate on solutions. Communities are the focal point of our work and we empower local communities to take ownership of their projects. This participatory approach ensures sustainability and fosters self-reliance.

We invest in education and vocational training initiatives so that individuals can acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their livelihoods and break the cycle of poverty. We engage in advocacy efforts to raise awareness about issues affecting vulnerable communities and influence policies that promote social justice and equality.

And finally, we collaborate with local authorities, other (I)NGOs, and local organisations to maximise the impact of our projects and ensure a coordinated response to humanitarian crises.



Community centres support displaced individuals and families

Community centres are safe spaces for displaced individuals and families. The centres provide livelihood support, protection for victims of violence, child protection support, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and infant and young child nutrition.

Hanano Community Centre in Aleppo provides comprehensive care, protection, and livelihood support under a single roof. Besides gender-based violence and child protection case management, the centre is committed to promoting livelihood opportunities directly linked to protection. Through programmes like sewing workshops and “nol and mosaic” trainings, individuals acquire the skills and knowledge they need to secure sustainable livelihoods, enhancing their resilience against vulnerabilities.

Hellok Community Centre in Aleppo seeks to strengthen the resilience and protection of conflict-affected children, adolescents, and their families by creating a protective environment that fosters their psychosocial well-being and positive coping mechanisms. The project uses various approaches such as parenting without violence sessions, life skills training, and activities like Zumba and self-defence classes. Furthermore, the centre is a vibrant hub for artistic expression and creative exploration because art can have a profound impact on healing and self-discovery.

Promoting mental health

In Syria, mental health is often considered taboo. Although many people process difficult experiences by confiding their feelings and fears with friends or family, others may require professional support. That is where Dorcas Syria steps in with its MHPSS team.

We provide timely psychosocial support to children, as unprocessed intense experiences can have a lasting impact on their lives. The community centres offer recreational activities and peer support groups to help children feel safe and rebuild their self-confidence. Focused individual and group sessions are offered to children who need more specialised attention.

Psychosocial support is also available for adults to help them cope with crises, increase their resilience, and positively address their experiences. Awareness sessions are held to inform people about what to do during and after events like earthquakes and how to handle their emotional reactions. Where necessary, people are referred to more specialised mental health services.

Dorcas Syria also trains its staff and partners on various MHPSS topics. For example, following the 2023 earthquake, all staff involved in distributing food or collecting data received psychological first-aid training.

Strengthening food security

Dorcas Syria facilitates food security in Syria through various programmes.

More than 4,500 children receive nutritious meals at schools and community centres in Aleppo. These free school meals are provided in areas where access to food is limited or children are at risk of malnutrition. The meals also help to improve children’s school attendance and performance.

Many families struggle to access food. Dorcas Syria alleviates this suffering by providing parcels containing staple foods like rice, lentils, canned goods, and locally sourced fresh produce. We also provide food vouchers for families who cannot access food through other means. These vouchers are redeemable at selected local markets. With this approach, we support local markets and give families more autonomy and dignity in obtaining the food they need.

In the aftermath of the 2023 earthquake, Dorcas Syria provided lunch sandwiches, hot meals and emergency food assistance with food parcels to families who could not afford food or could not access it.

Boosting the resilience of local businesses

We support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) by providing the equipment and trainings they need to improve their turnover. Following the earthquake in 2023, Dorcas Syria extended this support to businesses directly impacted by the disaster. We provided them with tailored assistance to enable them to rebuild, recover and regain stability. This targeted focus not only ensured the survival of these businesses but also strengthened the overall resilience of the local economy.

In another project, Dorcas Syria provides financial literacy training for MSME owners so that they can develop a deeper understanding of financial management, budgeting, investment strategies and cost optimisation. Enhancing the financial literacy of entrepreneurs empowers them to make adequate decisions, navigate economic challenges and seize growth opportunities effectively.



Mobile clinics improve access to primary healthcare

Syria’s health system has been severely devastated by the civil conflict. Besides a lack of hospitals and other health infrastructure, there is a chronic shortage of healthcare staff and many Syrians lack access to basic primary healthcare. Dorcas seeks to improve access to quality healthcare and foster better health outcomes for local communities. Mobile health clinics are one of the approaches it uses.

The city of Quneitra in southwest Syria suffered extensive destruction during the civil war, forcing citizens to flee. Critical services like healthcare and clean water are now scarce, which has created significant challenges for the few people who have returned. Dorcas Syria operates a mobile clinic in various subdistricts of the city for five days a week. The clinic’s team includes a gynaecologist, who provides women with valuable knowledge about their medical conditions and helps them feel more at ease during their pregnancies. There is also a paediatrician who ensures comprehensive healthcare for children in the area. Finally, the mobile clinic plays a crucial role in supporting older people through regular checkups for issues such as high blood pressure.



Malak grew up in a conservative family that prevented her from completing her studies. She married at 17 and learned to care for a herd of sheep and goats.

When the civil conflict engulfed Aleppo, the family fled to the countryside and started to raise goats. Unfortunately, Malak’s husband was injured by a shell, forcing the family to return to Aleppo for his medical treatment. ‘We had to sell our livestock and belongings to meet our basic needs’, says Malak.

Following the liberation of Aleppo in 2017, the family’s financial situation remained dire. Initially, Malak sent her children to work in waste collection to make ends meet. ‘That broke my heart, and eventually, I stopped sending them’, recalls Malak. Instead, she sold her wedding ring and gold earrings and used the money to buy two goats. Thanks to her hard work and dedication, the goat business became successful, and the family became the proud owners of 30 goats.

However, disaster struck again when Malak’s husband was imprisoned for two months. During this period, Malak continued working to provide for her family’s income. After his release, her

‘But despite these setbacks, I refused to give up hope’

husband was injured by stepping on a mine. That left him with a 40 percent disability. Malak sold the sheep she owned to pay for her husband’s medical expenses, which included several operations. Her family lived from the three remaining goats she had.

‘But despite these setbacks, I refused to give up hope’, says Malak. ‘So I registered for a small projects grant from Dorcas Syria to increase my herd’s milk production and breed and sell baby goats. I passed the practical test for the grant with flying colours and received five extra goats’, she explains. Malak successfully bred those and doubled the number of her livestock. This not only improved her family’s income but also their psychological well-being. Malak remains optimistic despite the challenges her family faces because she knows they are progressing towards a better life.

Sustainable Development Goals: Leave no one behind

Our programmes in Syria are directly linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, most notably:



Dorcas in the Middle East

Dorcas is active in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. These Middle East countries share several contextual and cultural similarities and face the common concerns posed by climate change and water security. Protracted conflict and crisis in the region have led to social and economic decline and high numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons in need of assistance. People struggle with rising food prices and high inflation, and the migration of skilled workers has resulted in a chronic brain drain.



Our work

In the Middle East, Dorcas operates on the Triple Nexus of humanitarian aid, development, and peace and reconciliation. We respond to urgent needs and work on longer-term challenges, such as access to basic and public services. Our strategy is to restore trust, strengthen human capital, reinforce social protection systems and advance gender equity. We address fragility by supporting refugees and host communities in the supply of basic needs and protection, and we provide perspective through opportunities for improved livelihoods and entrepreneurship.

Partners in Syria

Our Programme Partners:

- Armenian Catholic Church
- Armenian Protestant Church
- Catholic Charity Committee
- Greek Catholic Church
- Greek Orthodox Church
- Maronite Church
- Monastery of Saint James, the Mutilated
- Orthodox Youth Movement (OYM)
- Presbyterian Church
- Syriac Orthodox Church
- Syrian Society for Social Development (SSSD)
- St. Ephrem Patriarchal Development Committee (EPDC)
- Syria Trust for Development
- Armenian Orthodox Church
- Chaldean Church

- Children of word
- Jesuit Refugee Service
- Lamsa Center
- Latin Church
- Syriac Catholic Church

Our Strategic Partners and Donors:

- Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Dutch Relief Alliance
- Mary’s Meals
- Pre-emptive Love Coalition
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)
- ZOA
- Various INGOs

Partner with us!

I am Najla Chahda, Country Director of Dorcas Syria. I enjoy working with both (inter)national and local partners. Are you interested in a possible collaboration or wondering what contribution your organisation could make? Then please get in touch with me so that together we can explore the opportunities for a partnership.

Do you have any other questions about Dorcas’ work in Syria or would you like more information about a specific topic? Then please visit www.dorcas.org/syria or contact us.

Partner with us! Together we can realise lasting changes in the lives of people in need.



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We fight poverty, exclusion
and crisis. We empower
marginalised people and
communities to flourish.